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LODI WOMEN & THE WOMAN'S CLUB OF LODI

By Ralph Lea and Janice Roth

In 1871 a state and national woman leader arrived in Mokelumne (the future Lodi) with her husband Dr. Gordon. She had been giving speeches in Nevada and various towns in California. Laura de Force Gordon billed herself as a journalist. Three years later she started a newspaper called The Stockton Leader. It was the only paper edited and published by a woman. During the next ten years she studied law and was one of the first two women admitted to the California Bar. The next year she was admitted to practice in the U.S. Supreme court—the second woman to do so— following Susan B. Anthony.

By 1880 Lodi had grown enough for women to open their own businesses. Millinery and dressmaking shops in Lodi and Woodbridge were owned and operated by Myrtle Hollis, Eva Dougherty Perriman, Mrs. J.O. Perkins, Mrs M.E. Tindle and Mrs. F. M. Copeland. Mrs. Auda Zeigenfelder had a full line of choice millinery and dressmaking materials two doors

▲ *Top inset: Laura DeForce Gordon, Courtesy the Bank of Stockton Historical Photo Collection*
Bottom inset: Myrtle Hollis & Eva (Dougherty) Perriman, milliners, wearing hats made in Lodi.
Mrs. Rebecca Ivory, homesteading on the Tredway Place.
Inset: Mrs. Ivory, moving her house from Pine St. to West Walnut St.

▲ *Hotel Lodi in 1919; a Women's Club luncheon.*

south of the Sargent House at Sacramento & Pine Streets.

Hotel domestics and waitresses were starting to get jobs but clerking in a store was still a man's job.

Rebecca Tredway was born in Ohio the year gold was discovered in California. Six years later she and her family crossed the plains to arrive on the Mokelumne River at Winters Bar. After moving to the Tredway Ranch southwest of Lodi, Rebecca had to ride eight miles on horseback to school at Towne's Corner near Turner and Lower Sacramento Roads. She married Charles Ivory, Lodi's first storeowner and they built their two-story home on the northwest corner of Elm & School Streets. The yard had a large rose garden and all kinds of flowers.

Mrs. Ivory took care of all of the house and yard and still managed to assist others in need. She frequently aided families preparing for funerals. Rebecca Ivory and Mary Hill were also on hand to help prepare for weddings. There were no commercial florists in those days, so the ladies would gather flowers from their yard and those of neighbors and spend half the night making floral decorations for the wedding.

Church groups provided some of the social mixing for Lodi women. Card Clubs provided another way for women to socialize. One of the first card clubs was the Amacita Club and two of its first members were Mrs. Asa Villinger and Mrs. Francis Coggsell.

The lodges of Lodi couldn't start until they had a meeting room. This became a reality in 1876 when the Lodi Hall Association erected a two-story building on the southwest corner of Elm & Sacramento Streets. Clubs met upstairs while Grangers General Merchandise Store occupied the ground floor.

The Lodi Knights of Pythias, the Lodi I.O.O.F. and the Lodi Lodge of Good Templars all started in 1877 followed by the Lodi Masonic Lodge two years later.

The lodges all got a big boost in 1890 when the Lodi women organized and started lodges and chapters paralleling the men organizations. Flora Rebekah elected Etta Hunting as Nobel Grand. Myrtle Green and Malinda White were also elected as officers at that time. The Lodi Eastern Star started in May 1896, with two ladies named Nellie, Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Lemoin. It was about this time that teaching became the largest profession for women with dressmaking in second place.

Daisy Pleas, who started working in George Hill's Jewelry store in 1890, became California's first women watchmaker and continued for the next 60 years.

The wives of Lodi's eighteen Civil War Veterans started the Hartford Women's Relief Corps in Lodi in 1892, with Mary Pixley as its first president. They made flags and assisted the sick.

The pioneer ladies of Lodi were interested in the improvement of the community and for social activity, in

▲ *Hill Jewelers in Lodi: (l to r): Dr. Bradner, Minister of the Methodist Church, Leona Tarbell, Daisy Pleas, who was a watchmaker for over 60 years, and Mr. Hill.*

John Cory's gardens on Acampo Road, May 31, 1921. ▲

addition to their church activities. Twenty-eight women met at the Methodist Church and formed the Lodi Improvement Club. Even before the town was incorporated they helped raise money to build a library for everyone. They worked for better schools, fire protection, street and sidewalk improvement, garbage collection and beautification of the town. Mrs. Emma Witte Humphrey was elected the first president in April 1906 and served for the next three years. Belle Coledge, Dura Clark and Mrs. John S. Montgomery followed.

In 1907 Susan A. Jahant, a Lodi Girl, married Thomas L. Bawden and they moved to San Francisco where Mr. Bauden managed Truman undertakers for six years. Mrs. Bauden, Susan, became interested in embalming and studied there. Five years later Susan moved back to Lodi and purchased an interest in the funeral business of Frank Hale. The firm became Hale & Bawden and in 1914 Susan acquired Hale's interest. She also purchased the large residence of A. J. Larson on the north side of Elm Street midway between School and Sacramento Streets. She converted the home into a modern funeral parlor. In 1917 she acquired the Lodi Cemetery on Pine Street from Leon Villinger thereby giving women another first in Lodi.

The Lodi Ladies Improvement Club proclaimed its purpose to assist in the progress and betterment of Lodi. In the beginning they met in each other's homes. When membership increased they met in the old Odd Fellows Hall, upstairs on the northwest corner of Elm and Sacramento Streets. Later they met in the new Eagles Building at the northwest corner of Sacramento & Locust Streets.

In 1908, Mrs. John S. Montgomery suggested that the club could be stronger if it became associated with the State Federation of Clubs. The membership agreed and the Lodi club became part of the federation's region incorporating San Joaquin and six other counties. The Lodi club participated in efforts to plant trees along the highway and installed a drinking fountain on Sacramento Street in order to offer a non-alcoholic beverage choice for Lodi's men. The ladies also petitioned the Lodi Board of Trustees to build more sidewalks downtown.

Lodi's Public Library and Free Reading Room became one of the club's early pet projects. The Lodi Library, first formed with private donations in 1885, desperately needed a permanent home. Library supporters were trying to get money from philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who was donating funds to build libraries across the nation, but they were stymied because they didn't own

Hale and Bawden Mortuary, owned by Susan Bawden, shown at right. The mortuary, originally the private residence of A. J. Larson, was located at 11 W. Elm Street, between Sacramento and School Streets. ▲

▲ *Lodi Women's Club. Top row (l-r) Vivian Babcock, Mrs. Schmeidt, Ruth Erhart, and Mabel Wakefield. Bottom row (l-r) Mrs. Williams and Betty Riggs Heib.*

▲ *Nov. 4, 1923; Lodi girls at the Women's Club, including Helen Hale,*

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◀ *Bertha Sharp, at the height of fashion in 1922.*

Lodi Women's Club, 1922. ▶

▲ *Lodi Women's Club.*

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th Montgomery and Ione Lang.

Women's Club Building Association Directors, March 14, 1922. ▲ Members: Elizabeth Cook, Grace Beckman, Celia Thompson, Elizabeth Montgomery, Ada Hutchins, Marian Clancy, Lili Ferdun, Bertha Sharp and Anne Brack.

il 5, 1920; Tree planting on the east side of Cherokee Lane, Mae Crocker holding the tree, ored by the Lodi Women's Club and the Lodi Rotary Club. ►

▲ Lodi Women's Club, 1922.

Lodi Women's Group: Mrs. W.H. Thomayer, Mrs. Elliot Morse, Minne Richards, Angie B. Van Buskirk, Pauline House, ▲ Lottie Faber Tower (Dr.), Mrs. H.N. Madison, May Crocker, Mrs. Harry Sharp, Mabel Newman (Jim Newman), Edith McMurtry, Harriet Conklin, Henrietta Hines, and Genevieve Morse Roberts.

Women's Club, 1929; Elinor Carter ivian Babcock.

▲ *Women's Club, April 25, 1925.*

property. The Ladies Improvement Club came to the rescue.

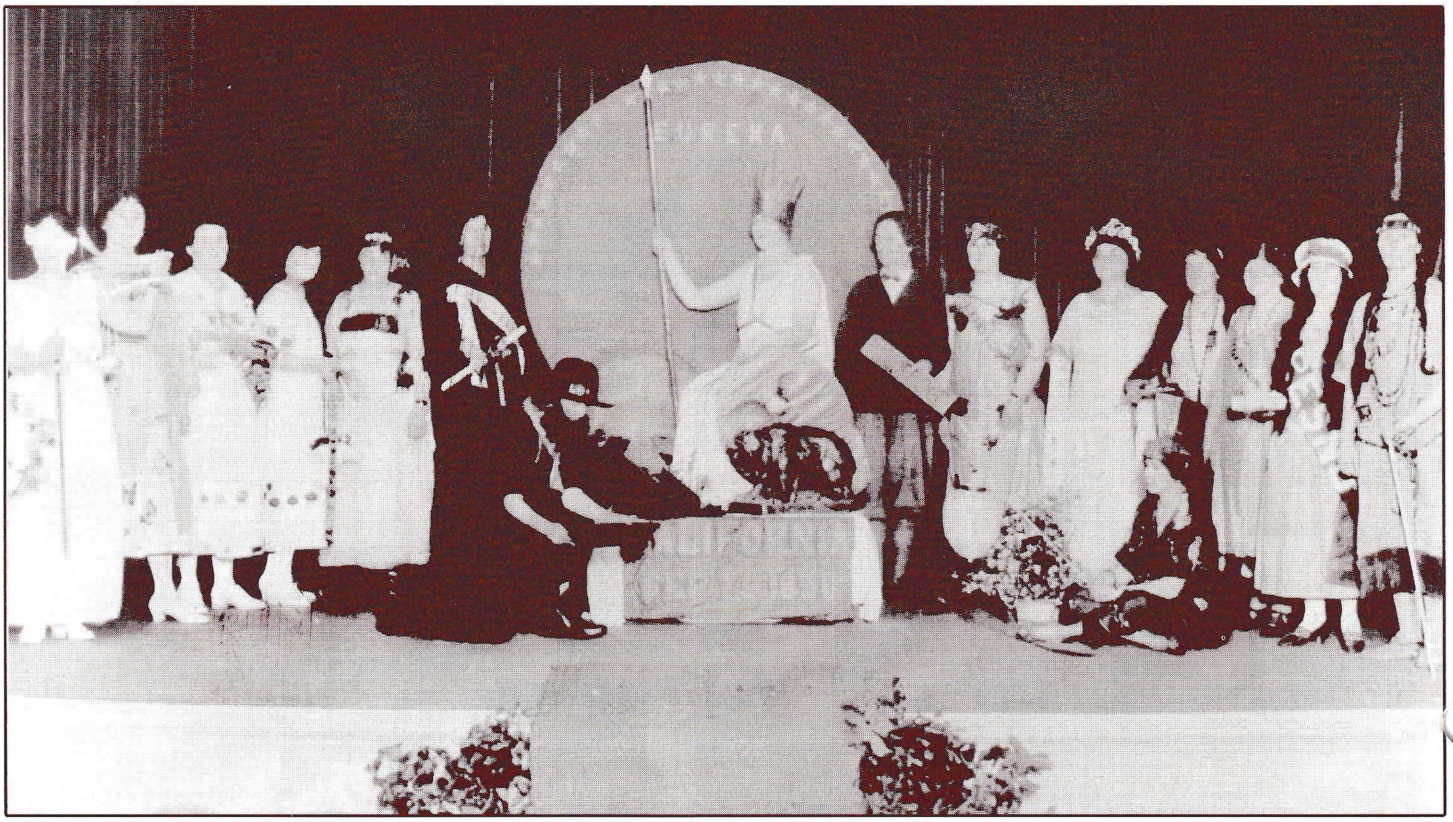
On June 5, 1909, the club held a dance to raise money to complete the down payment for the building lot on Pine Street. With the land secure, Carnegie donated money for construction of the building. This structure served as the library for the citizens of Lodi for the next 70 plus years. Today it serves as the meeting chambers for the city council and various city commissions.

In 1911, Mrs. Belle Cooledge was club president, Mrs. Dora Clark served the following one-year term and Mrs. John S. Montgomery was president in 1913 when the club changed its name to the "Woman's Club of Lodi." The club had 65 members. Dues were $2. Club leaders welcomed all women to join and help carry on the club's goal to stimulate intellectual and civic development and to promote fellowship among members.

In 1915, members first began to plan their own clubhouse. They formed the Woman's Building Association Inc. and sold shares.The corporation had 10,000 shares offered at $5 each. The association's officers were Mrs. Montgomery, president; Mrs. Wilson B. Thompson, vice president; Mrs. Freeman B. Mills, secretary; and Mrs. C. M. Ferdun, treasurer.

On March 29, 1915, the Woman's Club of Lodi bought the building site. The lot, just a short distance to the west of the new library building, was at the northeast corner of Lee Avenue and Pine Street. The club bought the lot for $10 in gold from B.W. and Nellie Thayer.

Nothing substantive happened for the next five years. Ambitious building plans must have been put off while Lodi endured food rationing, constant bond drives, men going off to fight in World War I and then the deadly Spanish flu outbreak. Finally,



▲ *Lodi Women's Club in 1925, celebrating the 75th anniversary of California statehood.*

▲ *Mrs. Torver's party, Lodi, March 11, 1925. Mmes. Smith, Maraheu, Rich, Inch, Torver, Senface, Haspark, Petsinger, Holt, Doherty, Fuller, Wood, Bewley, Fuller, Williams, Van Valkenburg, Synde, Van Gelder, Moore, Elliott and Thompson.*

in April 1920 the club voted to proceed with the building.

The cost of building was very high at the time and a campaign to raise funds was launched. Architect Ralph P. Morrell of Stockton was hired. He designed a colonial style, two story brick and stucco building with four tall columns.

In March of 1922 the cornerstone was laid for the building. Superintendent R. Melville directed the construction and installation of the exterior columns. Jules Perrin did concrete wall and exterior work. Nathan and Dohrman supplied the kitchen while the furnishings came from John Breuner Company. J. F. Loftus was the painter who applied the light French Grey color scheme to the main auditorium and balcony. The auditorium was the largest in Lodi at the time.

There were long delays during the construction because the club decided to wait for interior decorator A. B. Bassenett to return from Italy where he had traveled to claim an inheritance. Club members felt the decorator's touch was well worth the delay. The building's wide French Doors and Italian Renaissance chandeliers, which are still in use today, were highlights of the

▲ *Woman's Club colonial party, Feb. 24, 1932. Lil Ferdun, Elizabeth Montgomery, Mamie Jahant, Lauchland, Cook, Clancy, Hutchins, Grace Beckman, Ann Brack and Celia Thompson.*

▲ *June 13, 1935; Woman's Club model home groundbreaking – Federal Housing Act; 821 Walnut Street, Lodi.*

building's décor.

The building's foyer led past two rooms, one on each side and then out to the open auditorium which featured the chandeliers, a stage and balcony. The kitchen was located in the rear, and the building also included a full basement. There were wood floors throughout the structure. A boiler system and radiators were used to heat the building. When completed, the total cost of the structure and lot was $51,000.

At the time the clubhouse was built, the Woman's Club of Lodi had 450 members. Dues were then $5.

Soon after the building's completion in March of 1923, the Woman's Club of Lodi hosted the three-day annual convention of the 50 clubs from the Alameda district. More than 300 delegates attended this affair.

The Lodi club's popular annual "Jinx" event in 1923 featured a fashion review of gowns from the period between 1838 and 1904. The elaborate colonial-style attire was a fitting match to the building's architecture, according to event organizers.

In May of 1924, a two-day woman's Minstrel Show was held at the clubhouse. Tickets cost $1, and proceeds went into the building fund. Just before the holidays that year, Lodi held its annual Christmas Party for 350 children at the clubhouse.

Over the years, the Woman's Club of Lodi continued to hold numerous popular social events and raised money to cover the building's expenses and city improvements. In 1935, the club sponsored the construction of a $6,000 model home at the request of the Federal Housing Administration. Tickets were sold for the house and the lucky winner, Jimmy Sanguinetti, was announced at the club's carnival and dance on August 15, 1936.

Today, the Woman's Club of Lodi has 145 members, a relatively low number compared to the club's heydays from the 1930 through the 1950's. During those years, women rarely worked out of the home and club membership swelled to 500 according to Sandy Preszler, former club president and member since 1984.

The clubhouse, now listed with the state and federal registry of historical places, is still a grand showpiece on Pine Street and continues to be used for weddings and other social gatherings. Largely unchanged since its debut over 80 years ago, the building has undergone one notable change—air conditioning and a new heater were finally installed. Former president of the Lodi Woman's Club, Mrs. Mabel Richey was elected mayor of Lodi in 1953. Thirty years later Evelyn Olson became the second woman mayor of Lodi.

▲ *Edith Ehrhart and Mayor Mabel Richie on the steps of City Hall, Lodi.*

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